STRICTURES

On the Substance of a SERMON

Preached at BALTIMORE in the State of MARYLAND,

Before the GENERAL CONFERENCE

OF THE

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH,

On the 27th of *December* 1784:

At the Ordination of the Rev. FRANCIS ASBURY,
to the Office of SUPERINTENDENT.

By *THOMAS COKE*, L. L. D.
SUPERINTENDENT of the said Church.

By a Methodist of the Church of England.

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MAW
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STRICTURES.

IT is ſomewhere ſaid, " Flowers of Rhetoric in " Sermons or ſerious Diſcourſes, are like the " blue and red Flowers in Corn, *pleaſing* to thoſe " who come only for Amuſement, but *prejudicial* " to him who would reap *Profit*."

I ſhall therefore take but little Notice of the Flowers in this Diſcourſe, whether *natural* or *unnatural*: But ſhall make ſome curſory Obſervations which I conceive to be of more Importance.

The Doctor ſets out with an Attempt *to vindicate his Conduct* in ordaining Biſhops and Elders. He ſays, ' The Church of England, of which the So-' ciety of Methodiſts in general, have till *lately* pro-' feſſed themſelves a part, did for many years groan ' in America under Grievances of the heavieſt ' Kind. Subjected to an *Hierarchy*, which weighs ' *every Thing* in the Scales of Politics, its moſt im-' portant Intereſts were repeatedly ſacrificed to the ' ſuppoſed Advantages of *England*. The Churches ' were in general, filled with the Paraſites and Bot-' tle Companions of the rich and great. Every ' Thing ſacred muſt lie down at the Feet of a Party, ' the Holineſs and Happineſs of Mankind be ſacri-' ficed to their Views; the Drunkard, the Fornica-' tor, and the Extortioner, triumphed over bleed-' ing Zion, becauſe they were faithful Abettors of ' the ruling Powers. Bleſſed be God, and praiſed ' be his holy Name, that the *memorable Revolution* ' has ſtruck off theſe intolerable Fetters, and broken

'the ANTICHRISTIAN UNION WHICH BEFORE
'SUBSISTED BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE.
'And had there been no other Advantage arising
'from THAT GLORIOUS EPOCH, this itſelf, I be-
'lieve would have made AMPLE COMPENSATION
'FOR ALL THE CALAMITIES OF THE WAR.—
'One happy Conſequence of which was the Expul-
'ſion of moſt of thoſe Hirelings."*

Could any one believe that this was the Language of an *Engliſhman*:—a Clergyman of the Church of *England*;—and one who calls himſelf a Methodiſt?—As an *Engliſhman* he condemns the Conſtitution of his Country, and bleſſes God for *that glorious Epoch* when our Enemies triumphed over us.—As a *Clergyman* he vilifies his Brethren with the opprobrious Names of *Paraſites* and *Hirelings*.—And as a *Methodiſt* he contradicts the uniform Declarations and Publications of the Rev. Mr. *J. and C. Weſley*, for near fifty Years.—*See their Reaſons againſt a Separation from the Church of England*, p. 6.

The Doctor proceeds to anſwer a few Queſtions of his own ſuggeſting.—" But what Right have you " to ordain?"—'The ſame Right as moſt of the 'Reformed Churches in Chriſtendom: our Ordi-'nation in the loweſt View, being *equal to any of* '*the Preſbyterian*, as originating with three Preſby-'ters of the Church of England.'—Again. 'After 'long Deliberation, Mr. *Weſley* ſaw it his Duty to 'form his Society in *America* into an *Independent* '*Church*.'

If that is really the Caſe, is not he become a Diſſenter? Does not Ordination neceſſarily imply Separation?

'Our

* If Report ſays true, the Author of this Sermon ſtrove hard to become one of their Number. But after making Application to Lord P—wl—t, Lord N—th, and others, for Promotion, and being repulſed, he turned his aſpiring Thoughts into another Channel; and though the Eccentricity ſeems great, the End may be *ſimilar*: For it is a well-eſtabliſhed Maxim,—*The higher a Perſon climbs the lower he has to fall.*

'Our Biſhops, or Superintendents, having been 'elected *or received* by the Suffrages of the whole 'Body of Miniſters through the Continent, aſſem-'bled in general Conference.'—Where are theſe *Biſhops* to be found? Till this Sermon appeared (which it is ſuppoſed was *publiſhed* for that Purpoſe) they were never heard of.

'But of all Forms of Church Government, we 'think a *moderate* Epiſcopacy the beſt.'—That is, ſuch as we have formed ourſelves!

"But are you not *Schiſmatics* by your Separation "from the Church?"—'We are not ignorant,—we 'cannot be ignorant, that the chief Part of the Clergy 'and Members of the *Church of England* (ſo called) 'do either tacitly or explicitly deny the Doctrine 'of *Juſtification by Faith, the Knowledge of Salva-'tion by the Remiſſion of Sins, and the Witneſs of the 'Spirit of God.*—Points which we eſteem *moſt fun-'damental*, yea, *eſſentially* neceſſary to conſtitute a 'Child of God. And though we admire THEIR 'Liturgy, and are determined to *retain* it with a few 'Alterations,—we cannot, we WILL NOT hold 'Connexion with them, till the Holy Spirit of God 'has made them ſee and *feel* the importance of the 'Doctrines mentioned above. And for *this Schiſm* '(if it muſt have the Name) we are chearfully ready 'to anſwer at the Bar of God.'

Have not the ſame Subterfuge been reſorted to in all Ages to ſupport the worſt of Cauſes? And was the State of the Clergy and People of England in 1758, when Mr. Weſley printed his Reaſons againſt a Separation, *better* than it is now? Or in 1773, when he *reprinted* them in his Works, which he declares to be his "*laſt and matureſt Thoughts?*"—If not, what does all this Recrimination amount to, but a *mere Pretence?*

"Why did you not ſeparate before?" 'It has 'long been the Deſire of *the Majority* of the Preach-'ers and People.'

This remains to be proved, as will appear hereafter.

" But did not your Preachers conſtantly exhort " the People to attend the Service of the *Church of* " *England*?"—' In general they did, from a full ' Perſuaſion, DRAWN FROM EXPERIENCE, *that* ' *we had no other Alternative to preſerve our Society,* ' *but an Adherence to the Church of England*,—or a ' Formation of ourſelves into an Independent ' Church.'

If this is true, does it not diſcover the groſſeſt *Duplicity* if not *Hypocriſy* in the Preachers? And does not the Argument prove the Falſity of the Aſſertion above, *That it had long been the Deſire of the Majority of the* PEOPLE. For if it had long been their Deſire *to ſeparate*, what means that Aſſertion, *We had no Alternative to preſerve our Society but an Adherence to the Church of England?*

I ſhall here give the Reader Mr. Weſley's *Twelve Reaſons againſt Separation*, which will ſhew the Falacy and Abſurdity of all the Doctor's Arguments on that Head.

Reaſons againſt Separation from the Church of England.

WHETHER it be *lawful* or no (which itſelf may be diſputed, being not ſo clear a Point as ſome may imagine) it is by no Means *expedient* for us to ſeparate from the Eſtabliſh'd Church:

1. BECAUSE it would be a Contradiction to the ſolemn and repeated Declarations, which we have made in all Manner of Ways, in Preaching, in Print, and in private Converſation: *

2. BECAUSE

* And if this Circumſtance ſhould ever take Place, how would it deſtroy the Uſefulneſs of Mr. WESLEY's Writings?—For though they might be eſteemed otherwiſe ever ſo excellent, ſuch a glaring *Inconſiſtency* and *Contradiction* at the Cloſe of his Life, would ſo prejudice the Public, that it is probable they would ſcarcely be read at all by Poſterity.

2. BECAUSE (on this as well as many other Accounts) it would give huge Occaſion of Offence to thoſe who ſeek and deſire Occaſion, to all the Enemies of GOD and his Truth:

3. BECAUSE it would exceedingly prejudice againſt us many who fear, yea, who love GOD, and thereby hinder their receiving ſo much, perhaps any farther, Benefit from our Preaching:

4. BECAUSE it would hinder Multitudes of thoſe who neither love nor fear GOD, from hearing us at all:

5. BECAUSE it would occaſion many Hundreds, if not ſome Thouſands of thoſe who are now united with us, to ſeparate from us;* yea, and ſome of thoſe who have a deep Work of Grace in their Souls:

6. BECAUSE it would be throwing Balls of Wild-fire among them that are now quiet in the Land. We are now ſweetly united together in Love. We moſtly think and ſpeak the ſame Thing. But this would occaſion inconceivable Strife and Contention, between thoſe who left, and thoſe who remained in the Church, as well as between thoſe who left us, and thoſe who remained with us: Nay, and between thoſe very Perſons who remained, as they were variouſly inclined one Way or the other:†

7. BECAUSE, whereas Controverſy is now aſleep, and we in great Meaſure live peaceably with all Men, ſo that we are ſtrangely at Leiſure to ſpend our whole Time and Strength, in enforcing plain, practical, vital Religion, (O what would many of our Forefathers have given, to have enjoyed ſo bleſſed a Calm?) This would utterly baniſh Peace from among us, and that without Hope of its Return.‡ It would engage me for one, in a thouſand Controverſies, both in Public and Private; (for I ſhould be in Conſcience obliged to give the Reaſons of

* And is not this likely to be the Caſe in the preſent Inſtance?

† This Circumſtance ought ſtill to have its full Weight.

‡ Has Dr. Coke ever conſidered this?

of my Conduct, and to defend thoſe Reaſons againſt all Oppoſers) and ſo take me off from thoſe more uſeful Labours, which might otherwiſe employ the ſhort Remainder of my Life :

8. BECAUSE to form the Plan of a New Church would require infinite Time and Care, (which might be far more profitably beſtowed) with much more Wiſdom and greater Depth and Extenſiveneſs of Thought, than any of us are Maſters of: ‖

9. BECAUSE from ſome having barely entertained a diſtant Thought of this, evil Fruits have already followed, ſuch as prejudice againſt the Clergy in general; and Aptneſs to believe Ill of them; Contempt (not without a Degree of Bitterneſs), of Clergymen as ſuch, and a Sharpneſs of Language toward the whole Order, utterly unbecoming either Gentlemen or Chriſtians: §

10. BECAUSE the Experiment has been ſo frequently tried already, and the Succeſs never anſwer'd the Expectation.* GOD has ſince the Reformation raiſed up from Time to Time many Witneſſes of pure Religion. If theſe lived and died (like *John Arndt*, *Robert Bolton*, and many others) in the Churches to which they belonged, notwithſtanding the Wickedneſs which overflowed both the Teachers and People therein; they ſpread the Leaven of true Religion far and wide, and were more and more uſeful, 'till they went to Paradiſe. *But if upon any Provocation or Conſideration whatever*, they ſeparated, and founded diſtinct Parties, their Influence was more and more confined; they grew leſs and leſs uſeful to others, and generally loſt the Spirit of Religion themſelves in the Spirit of Controverſy: †

11. BECAUSE

‖ This was written before the CURATE of South-Petherton became a Candidate for the SEE of America; but ſince he has been ordained BISHOP of the METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, theſe Difficulties vaniſh away.

§ This Obſervation is fully exemplified in the preſent Sermon.

* What a Pity it is then that this Experiment ſhould have been again repeated!

† This is an alarming Conſideration, and ought to be much attended to.

11. BECAUSE we have melancholy Inſtances of this, even now before our Eyes. Many have in our Memory left the Church, and formed themſelves into diſtinct Bodies. And certainly ſome of them, from a real Perſuaſion, that they ſhould do GOD more Service. BUT HAVE ANY SEPARATED THEMSELVES AND PROSPERED? ‡ Have they been either more holy, or more uſeful than they were before?

12. BECAUSE by ſuch a Separation we ſhould not only throw away the peculiar Glorying which GOD has given us, That we do and will ſuffer all Things for our Brethren's Sake, tho' the more we love them, the leſs we be loved:—*But ſhould act in direct Contradiction to that very End, for which we believe GOD hath raiſed us up.* ‖ The chief Deſign of his Providence in ſending us out, is undoubtedly, To quicken our Brethren. And the firſt Meſſage of all our Preachers is to the loſt Sheep of the Church of *England*. Now would it not be a flat Contradiction to this Deſign, To ſeparate from the Church? Theſe Things being conſidered, we cannot apprehend, whether it be lawful in itſelf or no, that it is lawful for us: were it only on this Ground, That it is by no Means expedient.

It has indeed been objected, That 'till we do ſeparate, we cannot be a compact, united Body.

It is true, we cannot 'till then be *a compact united Body*, if you mean by that Expreſſion, A Body diſtinct from all others. AND WE HAVE NO DESIRE SO TO BE. §

We

‡ Very rarely. And it is probable never will.

‖ Oh! what Miſchief is one weak Man capable of doing?—To bring an eternal Reproach on the Work of the Lord, and upon his Servants. And to enable the Enemies of God and Man to exult and cry,—"Ah! ſo would we have it!"

§ No nor never would, if Men of ambitious Views and worldly Deſigns had not wormed themſelves in, to ſeek their own and ſcatter the flock.

We look upon *Ourſelves*, not as the Authors, or Ringleaders of a particular Sect or Party; (*It is the fartheſt Thing from our Thoughts*:) but as Meſſengers of GOD, to thoſe who are Chriſtians in Name, but Heathens in Heart and in Life, to call them back to that from which they are fallen, to real, genuine Chriſtianity.

We look upon *England* as that Part of the World, and *the Church* as that Part of *England*, to which all we who are born and have been brought up therein, owe our firſt and chief Regard.

We have a more peculiar Concern for our Brethren, for that Part of our Countrymen, to whom we have been joined from our Youth up, by Ties of a Religious as well as a Civil Nature.—True it is, that they are in general, *without* GOD *in the World*. So much the more do our Bowels yearn over them *

We look upon *the Clergy*, not only as a Part of theſe our Brethren, but as that Part whom GOD by his adorable Providence, has called to be Watchmen over the reſt, for whom therefore they are to give a ſtrict Account. If theſe then neglect their important Charge; if they do not watch over them with all their Power, they will be of all Men moſt miſerable, and ſo are entitled to our deepeſt Compaſſion. So that to *feel*, and much more *to expreſs* either *Contempt or Bitterneſs* towards them, betrays AN UTTER IGNORANCE OF OURSELVES, and of the Spirit which we eſpecially ſhould be of †

The

* How different are the Views of Mr. Weſley here, from thoſe of the Writer of the Sermon under Conſideration.——"Bleſſed be "GOD, and praiſed be his HOLY NAME, that the MEMORABLE "REVOLUTION has ſtruck off theſe intolerable Fetters, and broken "the ANTICHRISTIAN UNION, which before ſubſiſted between "Church and State."

† It is to be preſumed that the BISHOP of the METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH never read this Sentence. *It is worthy to be written in Characters of Gold*; and it is particularly recommended to *him*, that he would conſider it with the deepeſt Attention; for a greater Contraſt can't exiſt than the Language of his Sermon and theſe Reaſons.

The Rev. Mr. *Charles Weſley* has alſo ſuperadded the following ſtrong Declaration:

" I think myſelf bound in Duty, to add my Teſtimony to my Brother's. His Twelve Reaſons againſt our ever Separating from the Church of *England*, are mine alſo. I ſubſcribe to them with all my Heart. Only with regard to the Firſt, *I* am quite clear, that it is neither Expedient, nor LAWFUL for *Me* to Separate: And I never had the leaſt Inclination or Temptation ſo to do. My Affection for the Church is as ſtrong as ever: And I clearly ſee my Calling; which is, to live and to die in her Communion. This, therefore, I am determined to do, the Lord being my Helper."

When theſe Reaſons are calmly conſidered is there any Argument which Dr Coke has advanced to juſtify a Separation from the Church of England, which is not fully anſwered by them?

I ſhall take up but little of the Reader's Time in the Doctor's " Conſideration of the Characteriſtics of a *Chriſtian Biſhop*," (which compoſes great Part of his Diſcourſe.) For it is ſo very *ideal*, and militates ſo much againſt the Deſcription of Biſhops in the New Teſtament, that the dwelling on this Subject muſt be diſguſtful to the ſerious Mind. Particularly, as it is a Deſcription of no *living Character*, and much to be feared, very little applicable to the Writer himſelf—A Specimen or two may ſuffice.

In ſpeaking of the Chriſtian Biſhop's *Humility*, the Doctor ſays, ' There is ſomething interwoven with ' human Nature which immediately recoils at the ' very Appearance of Pride.'—It is to be doubted whether the Doctor has ſufficiently ſtudied human Nature from the above Aſſertion; ſeeing the Fact on all Hands proves the Reverſe.

Again.—' There is no Impediment in his Soul ' to the Divine Operation.'—Where is that Biſhop to be found, either living or dead?

Of

Of the Biſhop's *Wiſdom*, he ſays,—'He was born 'to govern.—He ſets his Feet in the Centre of his 'Sphere and feels the ſmalleſt Motion through 'every Parallel.—He knows with the cleareſt Pre-'ciſion when to ſpeak and when to be ſilent; when 'to move and when to be ſtill; when to *parry* and 'when to *thruſt*."—Admirable Figures!

Of his *Seriouſneſs*.—'He lives in the Preſence of 'his Maſter, and ſays *nothing but what is becoming* 'the Audience Chamber of the King of Kings.'

And to the Biſhop of *his own making* (on which Occaſion this Sermon was preached) he ſays,—'Only *feel thine Importance*, and feel thy Danger, 'and let not the Foot of Pride come againſt thee; 'but preſerve thyſelf in all Humility, and Chaſtity, 'and holy Love. and then thou ſhalt be a Veſſel of 'Gold in the Sanctuary of God, *thou ſhalt bring* 'Millions to Righteouſneſs immediately or remotely, 'and ſhalt ſhine in Glory as a Star of the firſt Magni-'tude for ever!'

How far the Specimen of this Sermon here given or *the* * *Sermon itſelf*, together with the Conduct an Proceedings of the Author, diſcovers him qualifi for the great Office he had *aſſumed*, muſt be left the Deciſion of the candid Reader.

However, a Caution may be neceſſary *to Members of the Church of England in Connection the Methodiſts*, that they ſtand on their Guard be not drawn into the Snare laid for them. F ſeveral Perſons have been ordained *in Englan* near twenty *in America* by Dr. Coke, the De evident, that *a Separation* is intended.

* Printed by Goddard and Langworthy, at Baltimor land:—And not a mutilated Abſtract, printed in Londo ſiniſter Views.

THE END.